

A Fall from Grace

By Christopher Barron
1742 Nichols Canyon Road
Los Angeles, CA 90046
(760) 936-9392
chris@chrisbarron.net
www.chrisbarron.net

Copyright 1998

A Fall From Grace by Christopher Barron was first performed at the Victor Mitchell Theatre at the Pumphouse Theatres, Calgary, Alberta, September 15-25, 1999 by the DOWNRIGHT CANADIAN Theatre Company with the following cast:

Marquis de Sade:	Joe Morris
Priest:	Josh Rimer
Madame de Montreuil:	Gayl Veinotte
Bishop:	Richard Halliday
Directed by:	Chris Barron
Produced by:	Brien Walker
Stage Manager:	Colin Herman
Costumes by:	Margaret Lamb

TIME AND PLACE

Late fall 1814, Paris France. Prison/asylum cell.

CHARACTERS

Marquis de Sade – late sixties, debauched, slightly over-weight (or under) and has a difficult time walking. He uses a walking stick. After almost thirty years of various imprisonments he is just returning to his cell from five months of solitary confinement.

Priest – very early twenties. Very impressionable, he has been sent to “save” Sade’s soul and administer his last rights. Being so young, he is still naïve to the way of the world, and holds steadfastly to the traditions and beliefs of the church doctrines.

Two Young Alter boys – dressed in white who aid the Bishop preparing for his sermon at the opening of the play.

Bishop and Madame de Montreuil (Sade’s mother-in-law) – have small roles. The Bishop is mid to late fifties, Madame late seventies.

SET

The prison/asylum cell is very small. Ten feet by ten feet, perhaps. With very high walls to keep the prisoner in. It has a small cot, dirty blankets and a lot of papers and books scattered about. There are thirteen assorted candles on stage. Two floor candlestick holders with five candles each at downstage left and downstage right. One table candlestick holder with three candles is upstage centre or near Sade's cot.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Some stage directions, mostly to denote motivations and temperaments, have been included. However, this is mostly for the benefit of the reader. Most of the action is open to interpretation. The script, though, is written to mirror two fanatics at opposite ends of the pendulum, that is, theist vs. atheist, old vs. young, traditional vs. non-traditional. Each is the alter ego of the other.

MUSIC & SOUND EFFECTS

Music and sound effects are also left to interpretation. Most evident, are the sounds of screaming insinuating tortures, clanging of cell doors, moaning and groaning. Opening music should be Monk chanting or the like. End music is Amazing Grace by John Newton, who himself was a libertine, changed to a man of God and inspired by God to write this song.

One could also treat this play as performance art and use a violinist or a harpist to underscore the action.

BLACK OUT – LIGHTS UP – MUSIC FADES

(enter two alter boys dressed in white. Each strikes a match simultaneously and begin to light candles at downstage right and left. Enter the Bishop and he speaks to the alter boys. They aid him in dressing and preparing for his sermon to his congregation. Music: Bach, Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring – Music for a Stressless World.)

Bishop:

We are the most densely populated country in Europe. For eighty years we have enjoyed domestic peace and economic prosperity. But many changes are happening now. With the loss of Canada and the American Revolution it has become necessary to establish a constitution – France is “one and indivisible.”

Louis XVI was frivolous and light-hearted. He let Marie-Antoinette run the country and look what it got him. The capitalistic bourgeoisie became too pronounced and widespread. Their demise was inevitable. Their tastes for elegance comfort and beautiful objects quickly turned libertinage. That was their downfall.

It is the responsibility of the church to uphold the natural direction of society dictated by the Lord. To create enduring social structures – structures that seek to perpetuate themselves indefinitely – from one generation to the next. *(to the alter boys)* Do you understand? *(alter boys nod, never looking at the Bishop)*

(Bishop approaches podium/soap box centre stage to begin his homily to his congregation. The alter boys stand slightly back of him, one on each of his sides.)

We must retaliate against these libertine tendencies! We now have a new leader – Napoleon Bonaparte. Now is the time to denounce society's decadence and exhort a return to a simple virtuous way of life. A return to the virtues of Ancient and Republican Rome.

There is a man amongst our community that we must beware of. That man is Donatien Alphonse Francois Marquis de Sade. I have it on good

authority that he is not just an ordinary man – he is a revolutionary. His writings and beliefs are insidious. His dramatics involve a revolutionary commentary on the conventions of our society. He dares to critically examine our normal society with his twisted and immoral philosophy of “Vice is virtuous and virtue is vice.”

Do we allow a man who publishes titles such as “The 120 Days of Sodom,” “Philosophy in the Boudoir,” “The Misfortunes of Virtue” and “Crimes of Love” to roam our streets? Poisoning our culture?

Should the guardians of the social order not have convicted such a person of such graphic sexual, moral and physical blasphemies? Are these the lessons we wish to bestow upon our children and grandchildren? Is this the society we want to perpetuate? No! No! A thousand times no!

He makes a parody of the social structure outside his prison walls. A society he does not understand and does not belong. His works are excruciatingly boring. Gradually increasing from simple perverse pleasures to torture, then even murder. The Marquis de Sade is symbolic of all that is malignant and depraved in the world. In the end he will reap that which he has sown.

(Exit Bishop. Blackout – only candles burning. There is a sound of a cell door opening then slamming shut. When Sade enters, he hesitates as he looks around his cell. Sensing all of the changes. Sade begins to light the remaining three candles as he delivers his monologue.)

Sade:

(Music: Vivaldi – The Four Seasons (1675-1741) No. 4 Winter Allegro Non Molto. Sade madly searches through his personal belongings and his papers. He is looking for his last will and testimony hidden away in a chest.)

Would someone be as good as to tell me who is against my having any shirts? I do not intend to go without them. How your meanness, that of my mother-in-law, shines in your every act.

Blame it not on me, if I go through so much laundry, rather on the laundress, who every day either loses or tears to shreds everything of mine she can get her hands on. Not a month passes but all this costs me eight or ten livres. Should such things be allowed?

‘Tis all too obvious, that I be sacrificed ... and all of you satisfied. Well, you can put all your efforts into driving me crazy, but never, till the day I die will you drive me to self-doubt.

I will admit I am a libertine, but I am neither a criminal nor a murderer. And for five years, I saved no less than three families from the farthest depths of poverty; and I saved a child – at the risk of my own life – who was on the verge of being crushed beneath the wheels of a runaway horse-drawn cart.

I am a libertine, but never have I compromised my wife’s health. Nor have I been guilty of the other kinds of libertinage so often fatal to children’s fortunes. Have I ruined them by gambling or by other expenses that might have deprived them of or even foreshortened their inheritance? Have I managed my own fortune badly, as long as I had say in the matter? No, I have not! And what other “noble” can say the same? *(Silence)*

‘Tis true that I have been disrespectful to the ass of a whore. But, does that justify being separated from my family, from my children, risking the loss of their affection? You tell me, is it reasonable that I be snatched from the arms of my wife, from the care of my lands? Must I be robbed, ruined, dishonored, and doomed? Do you agree that I should be prevented from bringing up my children to enter into the world, and from appearing in it myself? It is just to be shut up like a lunatic in an iron cage? Is it rehabilitation to be the plaything of a gang of jailers, the prey of three or four other villains?

How could you do this to me, a member of the French nobility, one of your own? Why, I repeat, am I behind bars? Why is imprudence on my part construed as a crime? Why is there opposition to allowing me to prove to my judges the difference between the two? And why is this opposition coming from you, my family?

Do not reduce me to despair. I cannot endure this horrible solitude unscathed; I sense the worst coming. Never shall any good come to you from bestializing my soul and rendering my heart immune to feeling. Give me time to repair my errors and the dreadful disorder I feel brewing in my mind.

But, the thoroughly corrupted society that we live in does not cater to strange tastes; they condemn them. Therefore, I was left no other choice or fate then to write about them.

(giving an example of his writing – like it is poetry) Throughout to present Vice triumphant and Virtue its victim. To exhibit a wretched creature wandering from one misery to the next; the toy of villainy; the target of every debauch, exposed to the most barbarous, the most monstrous caprices, prey to the most cunning seductions, the irresistible subornations. And for defense against so many disappointments, to repulse such a quantity of corruption having nothing but a sensitive soul, a mind naturally formed and considerable courage. Briefly, to employ the boldest scenes, the most extraordinary situations, the most dreadful maxims with the sole object of obtaining from all this to reach one's destination by a road less traveled. Have I succeeded? Will a tear in thy eye determine my triumph? After having read Justine wilt thou say, "Oh, how these renderings of crime make me proud of my love for Virtue! How 'tis embellished by misfortunes! May these words escape thy lips; my labors shall be crowned."

(Sade returns to a sense of reality.) They declaim the passions of my writings. They don't understand that it's from their flame philosophy lights its torch. They don't want to understand. To understand they would have to accept Nature as she is and banish their prejudices. But if they did that there would be no further need of a god. But, I address myself only to those persons capable of hearing me – ARE YOU CAPABLE OF HEARING ME?

What am I really guilty of, bad taste, bad judgment or just bad timing? And what is crime? We have what is considered to be a crime, which renders us happy, or the noose, which prevents us from being unhappy. The only deed man is given to repent is that which he is not accustomed to performing. Get into the habit, and there's an end to qualms and regrets; whereas one crime may perhaps leave us uneasy, ten, twenty crimes do not. *(pause)*

Think about it for a minute. It is vouched for by the innumerable examples offered to us day in, day out by those thieves and brigands who, most appropriately, are called hardened criminals. Crime is the soul of lust. What would pleasure be if it were not accompanied by crime? Why not try it and find out?

You don't believe me? The wife a man holds in his arms, can you say with certainty that she does not feign pleasure? About the woman who is mistreated by her master, are you quite sure that from the abuse she does not derive some obscure and lascivious satisfaction? Does a man really act insultingly to a woman when he manifests his desire to enjoy her? No, surely not. It is a compliment she is paid.

The world is peopled with idiots who believe it is to lack respect for them to avow one finds them fitted for one's pleasures, and who pampered by women – themselves forever jealous of what has the look of infringing upon their rights – fancy themselves to be the Don Quixotes of those ordinary rights, and brutalize whomever does not acknowledge the

entirety of their existence. No! A pretty girl ought simply to concern herself with fucking, and never with engendering.

Let us confine ourselves to simple evidence: through thoughtfulness, gentleness, concern for the feelings of others we saddle our own pleasure with restrictions. The only rule of conduct for me to follow is to prefer whatever affects me pleasurable. The greatest pain inflicted on others is of less account than my own pleasure. When it comes right down to it, little do I care the price I have to pay for my least delight. Pleasure flatters me – it is within.

If the authorities had any insight, they would not have locked me up to plot and daydream and make philosophical discourses as wild and vengeful and absolute as any ever formulated. They would have set me free and surrounded me with a harem on whom to feast.

(there is a banging and clanging at the cell door. Sade moves over into the dark corner by his cot, not knowing who is entering. He is fearful, after five months of solitary confinement, he is afraid they have come to take him back into solitary confinement. Enter Priest. It is dark, and his eyes are adjusting to the candlelight. He has a bible in his hand. He is young. He nervously enters to the centre of the cell. He clears his throat as he looks around.)

Priest:

Is anyone here? *(Sade moves slowly into the candlelight to see who has come to his cell) (looking around)* Hello? *(He notices Sade. He is surprised at how old Sade is)* Oh, Monsieur Marquis de Sade?

Sade:

(timid, yet curious) Who are you?

Priest:

I am Father Jean. I was sent here...

Sade:

Sent here by whom?

Priest:

The Bishop reports that your health is failing and that you should be removed from here – to a hospital.

Sade:

Nothing would make him happier than to see me removed from here – dead. He is like a toad in breeches.

Priest:

The Bishop only wishes you to receive your last rites and testament and make peace before your moment of truth.

Sade:

(childish) I won't go! I won't! My attorney will not allow me to be transferred. I still have friends. You can't make me go!

Priest:

It is your friends Marquis who wish to help you.

Sade:

Go away!

Priest:

In order for me to administer your last rites and sacrament you must repent. Are you willing to risk the punishment that awaits unrepented sinners, such as yourself?

Sade:

I have nothing to repent. Now go away!

Priest:

We are living in times of increasing doubt and uncertainty, now is the time to put your trust in the Lord, not the Devil. The Devil will only lead you down the road of unhappiness as you have already experienced. Give yourself to God and he will show you love and happiness that you could only imagine. Trust me I speak from experience. I know and understand your pain. I have been there. I have survived.

Sade:

To the Devil with you and your church! You don't really want to know who I am. It may hit too close to home. It is easier to keep me here hidden away so you and your church society do not have to look at me.

Priest:

(passiflyingly) I know. Oh, yes, I know. The anguish that you feel makes you paranoid. But, it is your mother-in-law who has sent me here. She wants to help. To show you that someone does care. Someone does love you. Many people do.

Sade:

I should have known. She and the Bishop are planning this. They cannot wait for the day that I am dead. With me alive, their injustices stare back at them each time they pass the prison. If I die they will be able to forget. Well, don't waste your efforts Father; I am not ready to die yet. *(Sade begins to chuckle under his breath)* Will they ever quit with their pranks? To undo my mind is the aim of all this. Well it has failed in the past and it will fail once again. Knowing me well, the imbeciles ought to have known that my mind is too strong and too philosophical to yield to such nonsense.

Priest:

Now that your wife has passed on, I truly believe that Madame wants to help you. She has become peaceful as she's aged. She is less rigid. A lot has changed since the Terror. I think this is her way of thanking you for saving their lives during the terror of the Revolution.

Sade:

My mother-in-law has never helped anyone but, herself, her entire life! There was nothing or no one she didn't do to get ahead. She is a whore and a leach of society. For a long time I have been her victim; but do not think to make me her dupe. It is sometimes interesting to be the one, always humiliating to be the other. How on earth could the wise magistrates governing the State today have let themselves be hoodwinked to the point

Of believing they were promoting the interests of a family when, the whole matter was patently the slaking of a mothers thirst for revenge? It was my mother-in-law, who made it her duty to "take me out of society." And now she wants to help me? Don't believe it Father. If you are not careful you will be her next victim. I warn you!

Priest:

You would rather say "These people deceive me" then admit that it is you who deceives yourself. Passions, I know, are blinding you at the present moment, but once they subside...

Sade:

Blinding me? It was at my dead mother's coffin, and she had me arrested after I had just cast myself into her arms. My pleas for forgiveness fell on deaf ears and a closed heart. I have yet pride enough, low though I am laid, not to ornament her triumph with my tears. And even in these depths of misfortune I have courage enough to refrain from pleading further with my tyrants. I do not trust her or her "good will".

Priest:

Seek not to be like evil men, neither desire to be with them. Because their minds studieth robberies and their lips speak deceits. You will find yourself in a place darker then any prison cell; hotter then any human fire. I have had visions.

Sade:

You do not know me. You do not know my heart. I am not the monster that everyone thinks I am. It was family who pushed me into the behavior I am addicted to. My mother-in-law considered me an outrager of asses. She would delight in telling everyone "*You see, gentlemen, you see, he's a little devil, full of vices; he might even ... perhaps ... who knows? There's so much libertinage in that head of his...*"

(Sade takes a candle and clearing his throat he re-enacts the scene he describes)

And there was my wife lifting her petticoats. The Bishop adjusts his spectacles, pen and paper in hand, his aid holding the lamp. *“Item, having betaken ourselves at the request of Dame Montreuil, we did uncover the said daughter and with care made proper and thorough examination. We proclaim the said daughter well and duly provided with a set of two very fair buttocks, excellently formed and intact within and without. We did ourselves approach the said member. We, at risk and peril, did pry, spread, sniff and probe, and having like ourselves observed naught but health in these parts, we have delivered these presents, where usage may be made in conformance to the law; and do furthermore, upon the basis of the exhibition described above, grant the said daughter access to the Tribunal and in future to our powerful protection.”* I should have put myself under protection of the police: I too have an ass and I’d be well pleased it be shown a little respect.

If it wasn’t for me how would she have occupied her time? Destroying another’s life – no doubt. Well, give my regards and tell her I am happy that I was of some positive service to her during her life. Thank her for the consideration of my last rites, but I have grown accustomed to not having any thanks to her handling of my affairs

Priest:

I ask you, should a mother not protect her daughter from corrupted Advances?

Sade:

Even if my corrupted advances did tempt my wife, the mere fact that she was tempted doesn’t presuppose that she gave into or would have given into these temptations. Listen well, my friend, to profit from any extraordinary vision – good or bad – does not mean that you must subscribe to it.

Priest:

I was warned that you are a master of words and games. But, rather than playing games with words; take good account of yourself and your actions.

Sade:

I am sure I have a good account of myself, Father. I am imperious, impetuous and extreme in everything. I have a disorderly wealth of imagination and human conduct such as life never saw the equal of. They must kill me or take me as I am – for I shall never change!

Priest:

With this you believe that you are deserving of the authority’s consideration to set you free? Forgiveness comes with reflection and reflection takes practice – preferably daily. You need to make peace with yourself. *(Screams of madmen in the background)*

Sade:

Peace? How can I find peace in here? There are too many madmen and one has ample opportunity of becoming so by contagion. Consider my circumstances, Father. Look around you. Let me tell you there is no better way to familiarize oneself with death than through the medium of a libertine idea. Let these reflections cause you to tremble and shudder with horror. I am sealed in an impregnable citied; no one in the world has the

slightest idea where I am. I am beyond reach of both friends and family: as far as the world is concerned, I am already dead. The only way I will find peace is when I die.

Priest:

Monsieur Marquis, I understand. I understand your need to express your individuality. It is a process of natural adaptation. However, you need to remind yourself that fundamentally we are all part of one – with Creation through Us. HE is always in touch with our every experience. We are an extension of our Creator, experiencing and learning together, with Him on our long journey of growth and change

Sade:

I tried as a young boy to belong. But because I refused to pledge allegiances to “God”, society decided to keep me out and wanted no part of me. It isn’t that I didn’t want to pledge me allegiance, but I needed proof. I don’t find that so strange. Do you Father? And, my allegiance to “secular humanism” wasn’t good enough.

(Both become reflective in their moods – stage is dark – only soft spot on each)

Priest:

I also had a yearning to belong. I was an orphan. Left for dead at the doorstep of the monastery. Abandoned babies, especially females are put into dying rooms. Do you know what these are? Rooms of death and decay, Half-rotting bodies covered with dirt, urine, feces and other foul matter you can think of. The stronger ones, lacking food for days would begin to eat the weaker. One way or another death is imminent when you are put here. There is no love to be found. What would become of me?

(Lights lower as she begins his fantasy of his lost love)

Sade:

I saw love. Once. He knew I needed love. He knew I had found love. I obtained his consent, and with tears in his eyes he asks of me naught but one last favor, and that is to go to Avignon to be married. I arrived to take my happiness, a lasting happiness, a happiness that nothing will ever again be able to trouble.... I waited, but nothing.

Priest:

I have never seen love. No mother. No father. No family at all. I needed someone – anyone. To love me and to accept me for whom I was. No judgments. Please!

(Lights down, spot on each as they speak to audience)

Sade:

(Toward the audience, harsh and mean) Ungrateful wretch! What happened to the sentiments of lifelong devotion? Who compelled you to break the bonds, which were to unite us forever? O thou ungrateful, faithless wretch! Fie, monster, born to make my life miserable, stay there in Paris forever! I confess to you that I am furious, and there is no horror I will not commit. There are no lengths – this I swear – to which I will not go, no horrors to which I will not stoop (*silence*)... *I blush to think of employing these means to keep you.*

Priest:

(desperate) What was to become of me – dear God! Could I ever survive this sorrow?

Sade:

What was to become of me? The sole support of my heart, the only love of my life.

Priest:

I needed to be comforted and consoled.

Sade:

Everything alarmed me. I needed her to love me always. I needed her fidelity, if she did not wish to see me expire of sorrow. I adored her and loved her a thousand times more than life itself. When I lost her; I lost my existence, my life. I died, and by the cruelest of deaths... my mind wandered, I was no longer myself; my tears beclouded my eyes because I would not survive such a misfortune. My father blinded me. He made me believe I was rushing into the arms of happiness, whereas all he was trying to do was remove me from it.

Priest:

I was left abandoned on the doorstep of death. The potential victim of the most barbarous caprices, prey to the most cunning seductions.

Sade & Priest:

(simultaneously) I did not deserve it.

Priest:

With but an innocent soul, and virtuous spirit, at the end of which road would my destination lay?

Sade:

Forgive the outpourings, Father, of a poor wretch who no longer knows himself, for whom death is my only wish. Even after so many years, what can make me cling to a life whose sole delight was she?

Priest:

God blessed me and took me down a road whose end was in the arms of a warm and loving soul. The Bishop saved my life. He took me in his arms and carried me into the warmth of God's love. He opened his heart to me, loved me, fed me, and clothed me. He gave me life, acceptance and purpose. The Fathers shone their light upon me.

(Lights up – Sade continues to speak to the Priest)

Sade:

(angrily) My father was as pompous to his family as to his servants, rigid to the point of narrowness, yet liberal to the point of excess. He was a politician and businessman. And like all businessmen, all "important" politicians, he would bleed the entire population dry if he fancied its blood might yield a few grains of gold. He led his life as a devout libertine unencumbered by social restraints. And because he couldn't manage his own affairs and properties, he sold my heart and my happiness to the highest bidder.

Priest:

I was given a personal tutor. The guidance of a man who was both severe and intelligent, one who exerted a good influence on my youth. However, flagellation and whipping on

the buttocks were a daily routine, despite the fact that it is generally accepted that this sort of discipline has dangers of awakening certain sensations of pleasure. And they did. Not for me though, for my tutor. He would enter my bed at night. Fortunately I did not keep him long.

Sade:

So, I turned to pleasures in life and the joys they dispensed. Unhampered by reins or laws.

Priest:

So, I turned to the church. To the study of God, my relation to him and his relation to the world. Committed and devoted to religious faith, observance and practice.

Sade:

(noticing the Priest for the first time as a person) I think it is very unusual for them to send such a young Priest to deliver sacraments to such an old and depraved criminal such as myself. The worst in history, so I have heard.

Priest:

It is not so unusual for a young priest, such as myself, to administer last rites. There are others here, as we speak, doing the same thing for other inmates. God's love does not judge. And as a messenger of God, nor do I.

Sade:

Yes, but the authorities knowing me as they do, should not have allowed such a young and impressionable soul alone with me. And beautiful. *(The Priest hangs his head. Sade watches the Priest as he decides his next attempt of manipulation. Sade gets up and moves into the Priests personal space. Like a cat moving in for the kill. As he approaches the Priest, the Priest looks up – nervous and apprehensive.)*

Don't be afraid. I know the urges that can trouble a young man, such as you, deprived of the society of women. We are like other men, full of enthusiasm relishing each memory as if they were occurring for the first time. 'Tis an entirely different structure we have, and in creating us, Heaven has ornamented us with the very same membrane as a women in their generative sanctuary. Not one of women's pleasures is unknown to us. There is not one we do not know how to enjoy, but have in addition to them our own. It is this delicious combination which makes us, of all men on earth, the most enchanting combination which renders our tastes incorrigible.

(Sade circles the Priest, like a vulture, licking his ears, invading the Priests' personal space.)

Priest:

Stop it! Your challenge does not sound that much different than that of Sodom and Gomorrah or various other heretics. Look at your actions. Listen to yourself.

Sade:

Don't interrupt! How sweet it would be, to be the slut to everyone who would have to do with carrying delirium and prostitution to their ultimate period. Each day, to be the mistress of a porter, a marquis, a valet, a friar. To be the beloved of each, one after the

other. Caressed. Envied. Menaced and beaten. Sometimes victorious in their arms – sometimes a victim at their feet.

Priest:

Have you no remorse or shame?

Sade:

You might feel sorry for those who have such strange tastes, but never insult them. Their wrong is Nature's too. Therefore, why should I have remorse or bare shame?

Priest:

Originality used to be one of your strengths. Now, you are just another of God's challenges. There is at least one of you each generation. You think and feel that by thumbing your nose at something that has been established for thousands of years that you are doing something original?

(Banging and noises louder than usual frighten Sade, giving a hint that perhaps these sound implied some sort of torture ritual taking place in the prison.)

Sade:

You're right Father. I am not original. I am doing exactly what the rest of the Nobles are doing. So what is this, a personal chastening I'm getting? And as if I was a naughty little boy, the idea is to spank me into good behavior. Wasted efforts I tell you. If the wretchedness to which I have been punished by the most commonplace of indiscretions has failed to make me mend my ways, your iron bars and your iron doors will not be more successful.

Priest:

Through history, when does God start punishing? When one starts whoring around. What have you been doing and when did you start to be punished?

God loves the person, condemns the act. God is punishing you on earth in order that you may enter heaven pure. He has punished, but he loves you all the same. Now as an individual, I can understand you wanting to put forward your ideas and challenge old traditions, but as a guardian of something that is much larger and greater than you or I, IT wins! Pure and simple.

Sade:

My manner of thinking, so you say, cannot be approved. Not by the courts and not by your god. And do you suppose I care? What would you know about life? It is not in my power to alter it; and were it, I'd not do so. Everything you know has been told to you. What knowledge have you gained through personal experience? A poor fool indeed is one who adopts a manner of thinking for others!

Priest:

How dare you Marquis! Where do you get off telling anyone about life? You have been behind bars longer than I have been a free man. What would you know about life? Life out there? *(pointing through a cell window)* The church saved my life and with it I live life. I am part of a living,

Moving, breathing, expanding and changing society. Look around you; do you like the life you have chosen for yourself?

Sade:

This manner of thinking that you find fault with is my sole consolation in life; it alleviates all my sufferings in prison, it composes all my pleasures in the world outside, it is dearer to me than life itself. I did not choose this life, it was chosen for me and with the help of your church and your hypocrisy. You mislead the simple mass. The most you could ever offer your congregation is agnosticism. For it is a fact that it is impossible for anyone to “know” whether God exists.

Priest:

The church does not have a secret truth. Its message is for everyone – including you. God is just some sort of warm fuzzy feeling within, although it starts there. His energy is intentional. The closest we come to experiencing Him as human is when we allow ourselves to experience the fullness of love. You have felt its warmth?

Sade:

(jaded) I remember how it feels to be betrayed and abandoned by love.

Priest:

It is from a hardened heart that this voice of ice comes from – know the truth about God’s love and the truth shall set you free!

Sade:

The truth may indeed set one free, but it does not always make one happy.

Priest:

Truth is something that is easily forgotten. But the recollection of truth, that is the underlying unity with God, will give you comfort in your times of stress. Monsieur Marquis, you are deserving of blame and censure. Why do you revert to shock tactics to gain attention? Everything you are experiencing now is the result of past actions. Your future will be the result of your present actions? Make them good. Make them virtuous.

Listen, I am here to do the work of the church. The work of God, our Creator. As much as you may like to think, it is not all about you, or all about me. No one else would come here today. That is why I came. I am your last chance.

Sade:

And you, Father, are delusional if you think good actions will guarantee you a golden handshake at heaven’s gates. Why is it that most religious services seem to be designed to keep the faithful masses as busy as possible? Is the church worried that if they leave you alone long enough to think about what is going on, you will stroll out and never return?

Priest:

The church holds no one hostage. People can come and go as they please.

Sade:

Then why all the rules? Why is it the church wishes to control and take away the pleasures inherent to us? What is it, Father that truly excites the human spirit? *(pause)* I’ll tell you. It’s the conflict and turmoil, pain and suffering. Don’t believe that the pleasure people receive from these is a distraction from heaven or social success – they are a part of it.

Priest:

I should prefer a thousand deaths to the anguish of participating in the philosophical crimes you are preaching whatever the thorns of virtue, I prefer them unhesitatingly and always to the perilous favor that accompanies crime. There are religious principles within me which, may it please Heaven above, will never desert me. If Providence renders difficult my career in life, which it is so doing, 'tis in order to compensate me in a better world.

Sade:

How can you believe in something so absurd, so far fetched? The fact that it is the idea of evil, and not goodness, that excites the human psyche is the very best proof that virtue is but a superficial principle in man.

Priest:

Let's look at it another way. I believe God to be a supremely perfect being. You on the other hand believe him to not exist at all. Therefore if existence is a necessary quality of the supremely perfect being, then a supremely perfect being must have existence, would you not agree?

Sade:

Honestly Father, you would have me believe in some historic relic as to the existence of such an omnipotent force? You need to do better than that. Perfect your logic and refine your reasoning and you will have no further need of your god.

Priest:

People believe in God, not because of logical arguments or the words of trusted authority, such as the church, but because they have had experiences that make them believe. And through these experiences – virtues are learned.

Sade:

Ah ha, let me tell you about virtues. Christians, you know, invented them. Do you know why? Being themselves slaves, powerless and destitute, for their very survival could look nowhere but to their masters' bounty. Their whole interest lay in persuading those masters to behave charitably. As the mighty man takes pleasure from the exercise of his strength, so does the weak man profit from his compassion. He too has a good time. It is his own way of having a good time – and that is his business. Benevolence is nothing but the greatest of all duperies. It accustoms the poor man to doles, which provokes the deterioration of his energy. When one is able to expect charity, he ceases to work and becomes a charity case.

Priest:

Virtue is the greatest scheme of conduct in our society.

Sade:

...which varies according to accidents of geography and climate?

Priest:

And your lack of it has been your downfall! Is it the responsibility of society, for the viciousness you have perpetrated?

Sade:

It's a vicious society where virtues are totally worthless. But having no choice in society, one must either play with virtue or be a victim of its followers.

Priest:

Oh, my son, do you not at all feel that your damnation is writ in what you have just uttered? At the very most, such principles could only befit a person perpetually in fear and humiliated.

Sade:

(looking around as if being watched) I am in fear and humiliated only by the degree of ignorance displayed by those who have put me here and taken my life from me.

Priest:

The church offers rituals, such as baptisms to cleanse the inherent sins of man, sins with which we are born. If you Marquis, decide to double on your original nature, that of sin, blame that on your inability to accept the perfect gift of grace offered to you by the church and God. 'Tis as much out of love for you as for myself, I urge you to embrace my creed. Now abandon these corrupt philosophies or perish!

Sade:

(becoming angry and impatient) Corrupt? To teach man how to think for himself is corrupt?

Priest:

Repent I say and give up these vices so that your pathway to heaven's gates may be paved with gold.

Sade:

For as much and as severely as you might condemn my thoughts, I can tell in your eyes there still remains a level of attraction as well.

Priest:

Despicable man! Why is it that you refuse to grant, to those who earn as due compensation the respect and honor of their sovereign rights? Why is it that your heart is shut to the authentic and innumerable proofs we receive every day of our lives of the Creator's existence? What else have I to say to you? Is there no leading the blind back into the light?

Sade:

All talk of your Creator's existence and of angels and demons, and of sovereign rights will be for memory's sake. Man is nothing more than man.

Tell me why is it that man can not accept that which is? And no sooner is one myth forged than another is created to support it. *(Sade notices the Bible in the Priest's hand and takes it from him)* They refuse to acknowledge that a myth is not an explanation. That is exactly what I call cheating. They have infected your mind Father. The further you sink into stupidity; the better disposed you become to faith. *(Sade throws the Bible on the floor)* Et voila!

Priest:

Just as the devil himself, you are too stupid to know that this attempt at subversion is doomed from the beginning. It, in the end, will be your utter defeat. Say it, my son, once and for all, do you not repent the host of sins unto which you were led by weakness and human frailty?

Sade:

And as your Jesus quoted the scripture to refute the devil so do you do so with me. Have it your way. Yes, my friend, I do repent.

Priest:

(preparing, Bible, cloth etc for the ceremony) Rejoice then in these pangs of remorse, during the brief space remaining to you profit there from to obtain Heaven's general absolution for your sins, and be mindful of it, only through the meditation of the Most Holy Sacrament of penance will you be granted it by the Eternal.

Sade:

I do not understand you, any more than you have understood me.

Priest:

(looks at Sade with curiosity) Eh?

Sade:

I told you I repented.

Priest:

I heard you say it.

Sade:

Yes, but without understanding it.

Priest:

By repenting...

Sade:

(imperious) Hold. I repent not having acknowledged Nature's omnipotence as fully as I might have done her keen tastes and her strong passions. I am only sorry for the modest use I made of the faculties *(criminal in your view, perfectly ordinary in mine)* she gave me to serve her. I did sometimes resist her – I repent it. Misled by your absurd doctrines, I should have followed desires instilled in me by a much diviner inspiration, and thereof do I repent.

Priest:

Do you not see they are merely the products of a corrupted nature, to which you attribute omnipotence!

Sade:

Father – it looks to me as though your evidence is as false as your thinking. What do you mean by "corrupted nature"?

Priest:

The Creator is the master of the universe, 'tis He who has wrought everything. Everything created, and who maintains it all through the mere fact of His omnipotence.

Sade:

An impressive figure indeed. Tell me now, why this so very formidable fellow did nevertheless, as you would have it, create a corrupted nature?

Priest:

What glory would men ever have, had not God left them free will; and in the enjoyment thereof, what merit could come to them, were there not on earth the possibility of doing good and that of avoiding evil?

Sade:

And so your god bungled his work deliberately, in order to tempt or test his creature. Did he then not know did he then not doubt what the result would be?

Priest:

He knew it undoubtedly but, once again, he wished to leave to man the merit of choice.

Sade:

Why does your god keep changing his infinite designs regarding man and why when he changes his mind he destroys? He is like a child, whenever he decides he doesn't want to play any longer and destroys everything. He takes his toys and goes home. He puts this man through the arduous task of

Collecting a male and female of every living species on earth and loads them onto a small boat, one by one, at which time he floods the earth?

Priest:

He was cleansing the corrupt nature which has begun to take hold of the goodness he created.

Sade:

There's that 'c' word again. In essence he murders everything that he has created and to what purpose? Since from the outset he knew the course affairs would take and since, all mighty as you tell me he is, he had but to make his creature choose as suited him? So where is the free will? Your god is not a god of love, rather that of destruction. The idea of God is the sole wrong for which I cannot forgive mankind!

Priest:

O God, you hear him and your wrath thunders not forth!

Sade:

Would you have me adopt the daydreams of Confucius rather than the absurdities of Brahma, should I kneel before the great snake to which the Blacks pray, invoke the Peruvians' sun or Moses' Lord of Hosts? To which Mohammedan sect should I rally, or which Christian heresy would be preferable in your view? None of course, for your god doesn't like competition.

Priest:

There are many man made gods and religions, but as you say they are frauds. A relationship with Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God cannot be compared to any religious imitations. Jesus stands alone unequaled. Who is there, can penetrate God's vast and infinite designs regarding man, and who can grasp all that makes up the universal scheme and why.

God can be know –
He is not unknowable like Hindu says,
He is not unreachable like the Muslim says,
He is not a force (or non-existent) like the Buddhist says,
You certainly do not have to be unsure about His existence like the agnostic says,
And you are not alone in this world like you, the atheist, says.

(Thunderstorm begins to brew)

Sade:

Let me tell you of your god. Picture, in your own terms, the frightful god you preach: he has but one son – an only son. For, as man doth fuck, so he hath willed that his Lord fucketh too. Within sight of all the universe this sublime creature did arrive to the most common of families. But not upon celestial rays as one imagines, rather upon a Jewish whore's breast, delivered in a proper pigsty did the god, who has come to save the earth, did arrive.

Priest:

You can downplay the background of Jesus Christ all you want, coming from the commonest of families. But, it is from the most common of backgrounds comes your salvation – comes the salvation of the world.

Sade:

An obscure childhood, perhaps not unlike yours. A few doubtless very libertine services this smutty fellow renders the priest at the Temple of Jerusalem. *(thunder becomes louder)* Next, a fifteen years' disappearance during which the scoundrel goes to prison himself with all the reveries of the Egyptian school, which at length he fetches, back to Judea. Scarcely does he reappear when his raving begins: he says he is the son of God, his fathers peer; to this alliance he joins another phantom he calls the Holy Ghost, and these three persons, he swears, must be but one! The more this preposterous mystery amazes the reason, the more the low fellow declares there is merit in swallowing it ... and danger in refusing it. It is to save us one and all, the imbecile argues, that he has assumed a fleshy shape, although he is God, mortally incarnate in the breast of a child of man. During a ribald supper, indeed, the cheat transforms, so they say, water into wine; in a desert he feeds a few bandits upon the victuals previously hidden there by his devoted confederates; one of his cronies plays dead, our imposter restores him to life again; he betakes himself to a mountain and there, before two or three of his friends only, he brings off a jugglery that would cause the worst among our contemporary mountebanks to redden with shame.

Damning all those who do not accredit him, the scoundrel promises the heavens to whatever fools will listen. He writes nothing, for he is ignorant; talks very little, for he is stupid; does even less, for he is weak; and, finally, completely exhausting the patience of the magistrates with his seditious outbursts, the charlatan has himself affixed to a cross.

Priest:

(lightning and thunder becomes louder and closer) Jesus Christ rose from the dead! He told his enemies before his death that he was going to rise again! They tried to keep him in the grave, but what man can suppress the will of God? Over 500 people saw the Lord Jesus Christ after he rose. Jesus is God incarnate. The frauds are dried up carcasses: Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Brahma and all the other bandits past, present and future.

Sade:

Listen! This detail is crucial; note it well. Men are pleased by the novelty. Weary of the emperors' oppression, the world agrees to the need for a revolution. These cheats are heard; they make a very rapid progress. Soon the alters of Venus and Mars are changed to those of Jesus and Mary; the life of the imposter is published, the insipid fiction finds its dupes.

Priest:

(pulling on the cell door) Besides Jesus Christ there is no other savior. If you persist with this heresy it will be back to solitary confinement where you will have plenty of time to think about the power of God!

Sade:

Shhh now, a little criticism never hurt anyone. Look at me; I am no worse for the wear of a little myself. He is represented as having said a hundred things which never came into his head; some few of his own drivelings instantly become the basis of his mortality, and as this romance is preached to the poor, charity becomes it foremost virtue. Weird rites are instituted; the most offensive of them all is the one whereby a priest, covered with crimes, has, notwithstanding, thanks to a few magical words, the power to bring God back in a morsel of bread!

Priest:

I beg of you not to present me the horrible spectacle of your blasphemies. Pray with me. *(Falls to his knees praying to the Heavens)* Holy Majesty, Saintly One, flood our souls with a celestial joy. O, my Protector and my Guide, I aspire to thy bounties, I implore thy clemency. Behold his miseries and his torments, O, Powerful God!

Why would I prefer to say with the misguided man, there is no God, while he over me in every instant proofs of this Divine Being's existence? This God deserves to be worshiped!

Sade:

Get up off your knees boy! I swear that all I say to you is the truth. May you God strike me down dead if it isn't so! If you want me to worship a God- give me a God worthy of my respect!

(One huge crack of thunder and lightening, Sade grabs his chest and falls to the floor. The Priest notices Sade and runs to him and feels for his life. Enter mother-in-law and Bishop. Priest looks up at them.)

Priest:

He's dead.

Bishop:

What Happened?

Priest:

I don't know. It happened so quickly. His blasphemy – it was the worst I have ever heard. I have never ever considered some of the things he was saying.

(As the Madame speaks, the young priest takes a piece of paper out of the Marquis' hand)

Madame:

I have waited for this day for almost thirty years. *(Looking down at the Priest)* What have you there?

Priest:

(opening the paper) it appears to be the Last Will and Testament for the Marquis, Madame.

Bishop:

Let me see that. *(Snaps the paper from his hands and reads it)* "I absolutely forbid that my body be opened upon any pretext whatsoever. I urgently insist that it be kept a full forty-eight hours in the chamber where I shall have died, placed in a wooden coffin which shall not be nailed shut until the prescribed forty-eight hours has elapsed. At the end of which period the said coffin shall be laid to rest, without ceremony of any kind. Those among my kinsmen or friends who without display or pomp of any sort whatsoever may give last proof of their attachment if they so desire. The coffin once covered over with dirt shall be strewn with acorns, in order that the spot become green again. Thus, the memory of me shall fade out of the minds of all men.

Madame:

(interrupting the Bishop) Never!

Bishop:

Except, for those few who in their goodness have loved me until the last and of whom I carry away a sweet remembrance with me to the grave."

Madame:

(snaps the will from the Bishop's hand, crumples it and throws it to the floor) Never! He is going to have a proper burial. And you are going to give it Bishop. I want the ceremony to be at the chapel with a cross and candles. Father, you and seven others will serve as bearers.

Priest:

But, Madame I must protest!

Madame:

(angrily she takes her cane and is about to strike the young Priest) Don't you ever disagree with me you peasant! Your work is finished. If you should ever repeat what you have seen or heard you will find yourself the new tenant of this asylum, in this very cell. Do you understand me! *(Priest reluctantly nods in agreement, then to the Bishop)* After all the heartache and trouble that son of a bitch has caused my family and me, I refuse to allow him the last word. I cannot – I will not! There is nothing more that could be more satisfying and rewarding to me than to think that his soul burns in hell for all of eternity. As a Christian woman I must see to it that the right thing is done.

(“Amazing Grace”, fades in and swells. Lights fade out.)

